STUDENT LEAFLET

1992

NATURAL DISASTERS

are you prepared ?

dear students,

Pompeii and Herculaneum were once beautiful cities in Italy just off the coast of the Bay of Naples. In 79 A.D., a colossal volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius destroyed them completely, killing hundreds of people. For over 1,600 years, these cities lay buried under cement-like volcanic matter. Then, in 1709, a well-digger accidentally broke his spade in what used to be a theatre in Herculaneum, and the world rediscovered the long-lost cities.

Volcanic eruption is just one of the many kinds of natural disasters that hit the world from time to time. Cyclones, earthquakes, floods, forest fires and other natural disasters claim hundreds of thousands of lives each year and damage property worth billions of dollars. In 1931, more than 3.7 million people lost their lives due to floods of the Hwang-ho River in China. In 1989, more than 60,000 people became homeless when a hurricane lashed across the Caribbean Sea. And in March 1992, more than 36,000 buildings were destroyed after an earthquake struck Turkey.

Natural disasters can occur anywhere, any time. They do not discriminate between rich and poor, or between countries big and small. In the past, many people believed natural disasters were sent by gods to punish them for their sins and there was very little they could do about such disasters. Now we do have enough experience and ability to reduce the impact of natural disaste. by taking early precautions. We know years in advance which regions are likely to be hit by natural hazards. Satellites, for example, can forecast the approaches of floods and cyclones; seismographs can record the force and direction of an earthquake. As you will see from this leaflet, countries which take precautions in time are able to reduce greatly their loss and suffering from such disasters.

At the United Nations, the countries of the world are working together to minimize the harm caused by natural disasters. With this end in mind, they have declared the 1990s the **International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR).** During this Decade, a concerted effort is being made to reduce the loss of life and destruction caused throughout the world by the violent forces of nature.

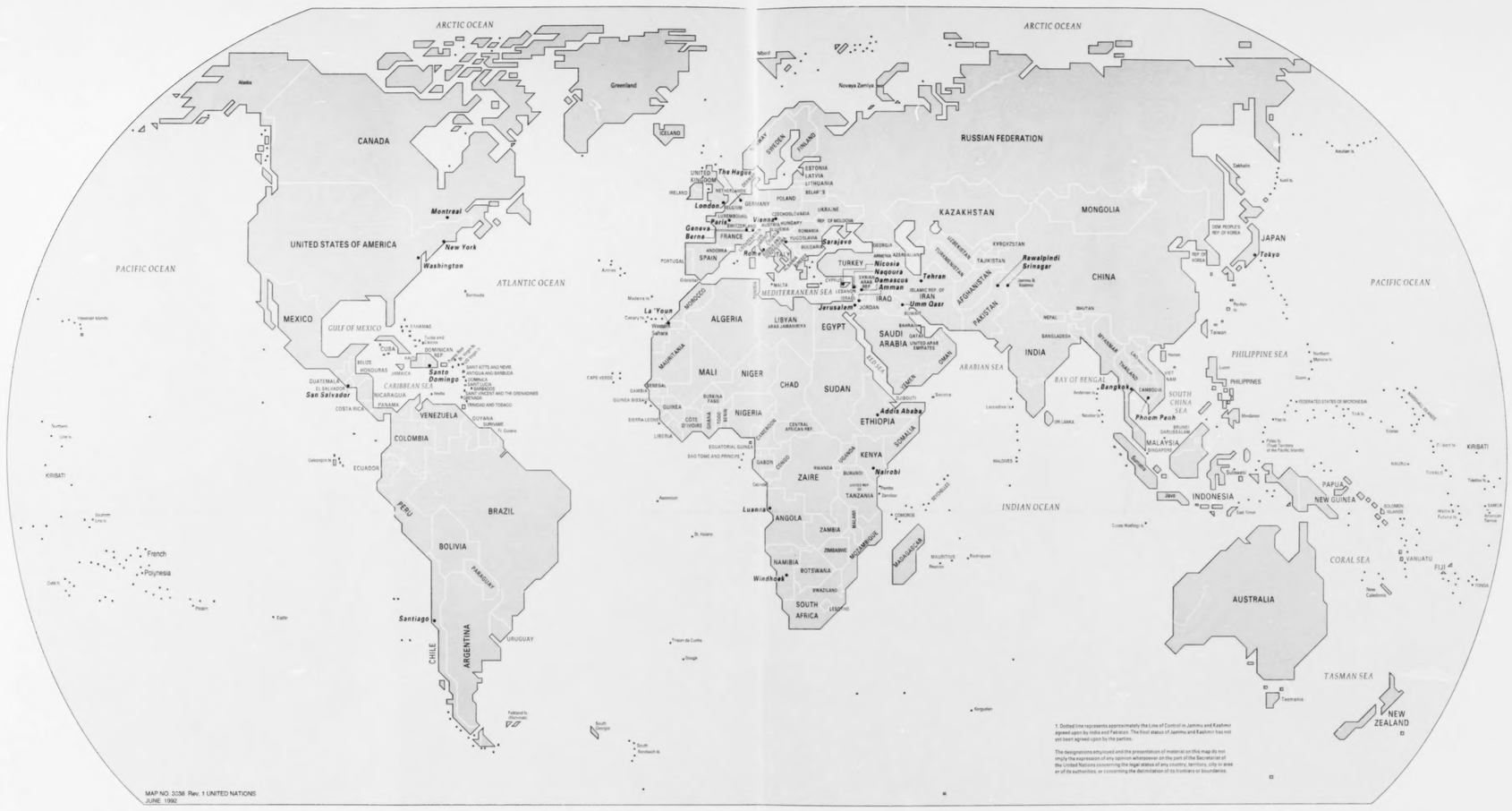
Although the United Nations and the countries of the world are involved, the Decade will be successful only when each community takes up the challenge and prepares itself for possible natural disasters. For example, an early warning system can be set up so that, before a disaster strikes, people will have enough time to reach a safe place. Storm-proof shelters can be built where people can be protected. Food and medical supplies can be stocked so that they are available when needed. Everyone, even children, can help by knowing what to do before, during and after a disaster.

Natural disasters are part of the environment in which we live. We cannot eliminate them, but if we work together, both locally and internationally, we'll be able to limit the loss of life and the destruction they cause.

Jan Eliasson
Emergency Relief Coordinator
United Nations

UNITED NATIONS

united nations map of the world



1. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

MAP NO. 3038 Rev. 1 UNITED NATIONS
JUNE 1992

Members of the United Nations

(As of May 1992)

Country	Date of Admission	Country	Date of Admission	Country	Date of Admission	Country	Date of Admission
Afghanistan	19 Nov. 1946	Brunei Darussalam	21 Sep. 1984	Denmark	24 Oct. 1945	Guinea-Bissau	17 Sep. 1974
Albania	14 Dec. 1955	Bulgaria	14 Dec. 1955	Djibouti	20 Sep. 1977	Guyana	20 Sep. 1966
Algeria	8 Oct. 1962	Burkina Faso	20 Sep. 1960	Dominica	18 Dec. 1978	Haiti	24 Oct. 1945
Angola	1 Dec. 1976	Burundi	18 Sep. 1962	Dominican Republic	24 Oct. 1945	Honduras	17 Dec. 1945
Antigua and Barbuda	11 Nov. 1981	Cambodia	14 Dec. 1955	Ecuador	21 Dec. 1945	Hungary	14 Dec. 1955
Argentina	24 Oct. 1945	Cameroon	20 Sep. 1960	Egypt	24 Oct. 1945	Iceland	19 Nov. 1946
Armenia	2 Mar. 1992	Canada	9 Nov. 1945	El Salvador	24 Oct. 1945	India	30 Oct. 1945
Australia	1 Nov. 1945	Cape Verde	16 Sep. 1975	Equatorial Guinea	12 Nov. 1968	Indonesia	28 Sep. 1950
Austria	14 Dec. 1955	Central African Republic	20 Sep. 1960	Estonia	17 Sep. 1991	Iran	24 Oct. 1945
Azerbaijan	2 Mar. 1992	Chad	20 Sep. 1960	Ethiopia	13 Nov. 1945	Iraq	21 Dec. 1945
Bahamas	18 Sep. 1973	Chile	24 Oct. 1945	Federated States of Micronesia	17 Sep. 1991	Ireland	14 Dec. 1955
Bahrain	21 Sep. 1971	China	24 Oct. 1945			Israel	11 May 1949
Bangladesh	17 Sep. 1974	Colombia	5 Nov. 1945	Fiji	13 Oct. 1970	Italy	14 Dec. 1955
Barbados	9 Dec. 1966	Comoros	12 Nov. 1975	Finland	14 Dec. 1955	Jamaica	18 Sep. 1962
Belarus	24 Oct. 1945	Congo	20 Sep. 1960	France	24 Oct. 1945	Japan	18 Dec. 1956
Belgium	27 Dec. 1945	Costa Rica	2 Nov. 1945	Gabon	20 Sep. 1960	Jordan	14 Dec. 1955
Belize	25 Sep. 1981	Côte d'Ivoire	20 Sep. 1960	Gambia	21 Sep. 1965	Kazakhstan	2 Mar. 1992
Benin	20 Sep. 1960	Croatia	22 May 1992	Germany	18 Sep. 1973	Kenya	16 Dec. 1963
Bhutan	21 Sep. 1971	Cuba	24 Oct. 1945	Ghana	8 Mar. 1957	Kuwait	14 May 1963
Bolivia	14 Nov. 1945	Cyprus	20 Sep. 1960	Greece	25 Oct. 1945	Kyrgyzstan	2 Mar. 1992
Bosnia and Herzegovina	22 May 1992	Czechoslo kia	24 Oct. 1945	Grenada	17 Sep. 1974	Lao People's Democratic Republic	14 Dec. 1955
Botswana	17 Oct. 1966	Democratic eople's Republic of Korea	17 Sep. 1991	Guatemala	21Nov. 1945		
Brazil	24 Oct. 1945			Guinea	12 Dec. 1958	Latvia	17 Sep. 1991

Country	Date of Admission	Country	Date of Admission	Country	Date of Admission	Country	Date of Admission
Lebanon	24 Oct. 1945	Nepal	14 Dec. 1955	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	16 Sep. 1980	Togo	20 Sep. 1960
Lesotho	17 Oct. 1966	Netherlands	10 Dec. 1945			Trinidad and Tobago	18 Sep. 1962
Liberia	2 Nov. 1945	New Zealand	24 Oct. 1945	Samoa	15 Dec. 1976	Tunisia	12 Nov. 1956
Libya	14 Dec. 1955	Nicaragua	24 Oct. 1945	San Marino	2 Mar. 1992	Turkey	24 Oct. 1945
Liechtenstein	18 Sep. 1990	Niger	20 Sep. 1960	Sao Tomé and Principe	16 Sep. 1975	Turkmenistan	2 Mar. 1992
Lithuania	17 Sep. 1991	Nigeria	7 Oct. 1960	Saudi Arabia	24 Oct. 1945	Uganda	25 Oct. 1962
Luxembourg	24 Oct. 1945	Norway	27 Nov. 1945	Senegal	28 Sep. 1960	Ukraine	24 Oct. 1945
Madagascar	20 Sep. 1960	Oman	7 Oct. 1971	Seychelles	21 Sep. 1976	United Arab Emirates	9 Dec. 1971
Malawi	1 Dec. 1964	Pakistan	30 Sep. 1947	Sierra Leone	27 Sep. 1961	United Kingdom	24 Oct. 1945
Malaysia	17 Sep. 1957	Panama	13 Nov. 1945	Singapore	21 Sep. 1965	United Republic of Tanzania	14 Dec. 1961
Maldives	21 Sep. 1965	Papua New Guinea	10 Oct. 1975	Slovenia	22 May 1992	United States	24 Oct. 1945
Mali	28 Sep. 1960	Paraguay	24 Oct. 1945	Solomon Islands	19 Sep. 1978	Uruguay	18 Dec. 1945
Malta	1 Dec. 1964	Peru	31 Oct. 1945	Somalia	20 Sep. 1960	Uzbekistan	2 Mar. 1992
Marshall Islands	17 Sep. 1991	Philippines	24 Oct. 1945	South Africa	7 Nov. 1945	Vanuatu	15 Sep. 1981
Mauritania	27 Oct. 1961	Poland	24 Oct. 1945	Spain	14 Dec. 1955	Venezuela	15 Nov. 1945
Mauritius	24 Apr. 1968	Portugal	14 Dec. 1955	Sri Lanka	14 Dec. 1955	Viet Nam	20 Sep. 1977
Mexico	7 Nov. 1945	Qatar	21 Sep. 1971	Sudan	12 Nov. 1956	Yemen	30 Sep. 1947
Moldova	2 Mar. 1992	Republic of Korea	17 Sep. 1991	Suriname	4 Dec. 1975	Yugoslavia	24 Oct. 1945
Mongolia	27 Oct. 1961	Romania	14 Dec. 1955	Swaziland	24 Sep. 1968	Zaire	20 Sep. 1960
Morocco	12 Nov. 1956	Russian Federation	24 Oct. 1945	Sweden	19 Nov. 1946	Zambia	1 Dec. 1964
Mozambique	16 Sep. 1975	Rwanda	18 Sep. 1962	Syria	24 Oct. 1945	Zimbabwe	25 Aug. 1980
Myanmar	19 Apr. 1948	Saint Kitts and Nevis	23 Sep. 1983	Tajikistan	2 Mar. 1992		
Namibia	23 Apr. 1990	Saint Lucia	18 Sep. 1979	Thailand	16 Dec. 1946		

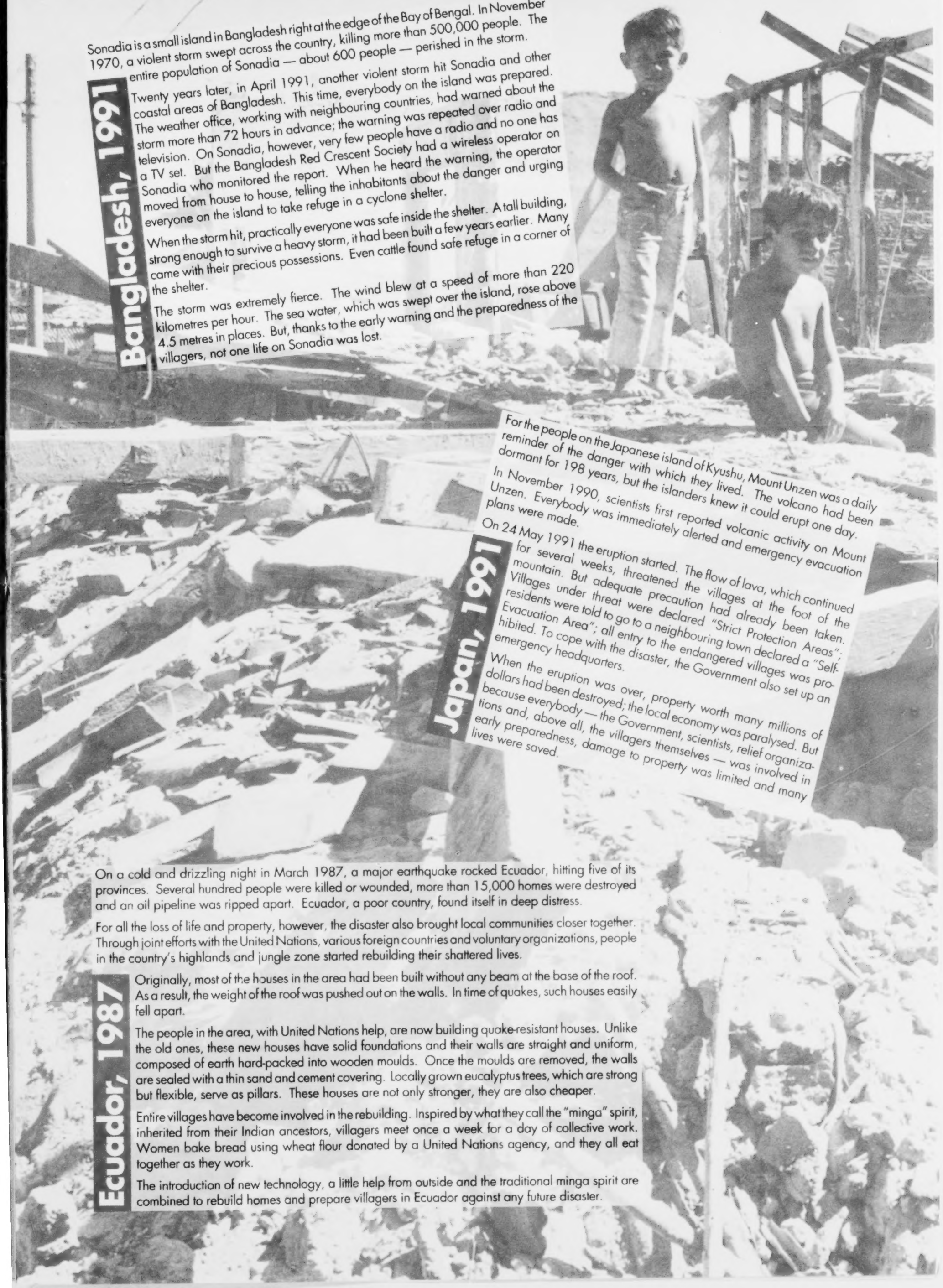
This world map shows major natural disasters that have hit different countries of the world over the past 100 years. Symbols used on the map represent various types of natural disasters. Identify the symbols and the countries where the disasters have occurred. To locate the countries correctly, you may consult the list of "Some Major Natural Disasters (1900-1991)" and the UN Map of the World included in this leaflet.

some major natural disasters
(1900-1991)

YEAR	EVENT		PLACE	DEATHS
1900	Hurricane	●	USA	6,000
1920	Earthquake / Landslide	◆	China	200,000
1923	Earthquake / Fire	◆	Japan	143,000
1931	Flood	✚	China	3,700,000
1932	Earthquake	◆	China	70,000
1935	Earthquake	◆	India	60,000
1939	Earthquake / Tsunami	◆	Chile	30,000
1948	Earthquake	◆	USSR	100,000
1949	Floods	✚	China	57,000
1949	Earthquake / Landslides	◆	USSR	12,000-20,000
1954	Floods	✚	China	40,000
1960	Earthquake	◆	Morocco	12,000
1962	Earthquake	◆	Iran	12,000
1963	Tropical cyclone	✪	Bangladesh	22,000
1965	Tropical cyclone	✪	Bangladesh	17,000
1965	Tropical cyclone	✪	Bangladesh	30,000
1965	Tropical cyclone	✪	Bangladesh	10,000
1968	Earthquake	◆	Iran	12,000
1970	Earthquake / Landslide	◆	Peru	70,000
1970	Tropical cyclone	✪	Bangladesh	300,000-500,000
1971	Tropical cyclone	✪	India	10,000-25,000
1976	Earthquake	◆	China	250,000
1976	Earthquake	◆	Guatemala	24,000
1977	Tropical cyclone	✪	India	20,000
1978	Earthquake	◆	Iran	25,000
1985	Earthquake	◆	Mexico	10,000
1985	Volcanic eruption	▲	Colombia	22,000
1988	Earthquake	◆	USSR	25,000
1990	Earthquake	◆	Iran	37,000
1991	Tropical cyclone	✪	Bangladesh	140,000

Sources: National Academy of Sciences (USA), WHO and UNDRO

WHEN A COMMUNITY IS READY



Bangladesh, 1991

Sonadia is a small island in Bangladesh right at the edge of the Bay of Bengal. In November 1970, a violent storm swept across the country, killing more than 500,000 people. The entire population of Sonadia — about 600 people — perished in the storm.

Twenty years later, in April 1991, another violent storm hit Sonadia and other coastal areas of Bangladesh. This time, everybody on the island was prepared. The weather office, working with neighbouring countries, had warned about the storm more than 72 hours in advance; the warning was repeated over radio and television. On Sonadia, however, very few people have a radio and no one has a TV set. But the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society had a wireless operator on Sonadia who monitored the report. When he heard the warning, the operator moved from house to house, telling the inhabitants about the danger and urging everyone on the island to take refuge in a cyclone shelter.

When the storm hit, practically everyone was safe inside the shelter. A tall building, strong enough to survive a heavy storm, it had been built a few years earlier. Many came with their precious possessions. Even cattle found safe refuge in a corner of the shelter.

The storm was extremely fierce. The wind blew at a speed of more than 220 kilometres per hour. The sea water, which was swept over the island, rose above 4.5 metres in places. But, thanks to the early warning and the preparedness of the villagers, not one life on Sonadia was lost.

Japan, 1991

For the people on the Japanese island of Kyushu, Mount Unzen was a daily reminder of the danger with which they lived. The volcano had been dormant for 198 years, but the islanders knew it could erupt one day.

In November 1990, scientists first reported volcanic activity on Mount Unzen. Everybody was immediately alerted and emergency evacuation plans were made.

On 24 May 1991 the eruption started. The flow of lava, which continued for several weeks, threatened the villages at the foot of the mountain. But adequate precaution had already been taken. Villages under threat were declared "Strict Protection Areas"; residents were told to go to a neighbouring town declared a "Self-Evacuation Area"; all entry to the endangered villages was prohibited. To cope with the disaster, the Government also set up an emergency headquarters.

When the eruption was over, property worth many millions of dollars had been destroyed; the local economy was paralysed. But because everybody — the Government, scientists, relief organizations and, above all, the villagers themselves — was involved in early preparedness, damage to property was limited and many lives were saved.

Ecuador, 1987

On a cold and drizzling night in March 1987, a major earthquake rocked Ecuador, hitting five of its provinces. Several hundred people were killed or wounded, more than 15,000 homes were destroyed and an oil pipeline was ripped apart. Ecuador, a poor country, found itself in deep distress.

For all the loss of life and property, however, the disaster also brought local communities closer together. Through joint efforts with the United Nations, various foreign countries and voluntary organizations, people in the country's highlands and jungle zone started rebuilding their shattered lives.

Originally, most of the houses in the area had been built without any beam at the base of the roof. As a result, the weight of the roof was pushed out on the walls. In time of quakes, such houses easily fell apart.

The people in the area, with United Nations help, are now building quake-resistant houses. Unlike the old ones, these new houses have solid foundations and their walls are straight and uniform, composed of earth hard-packed into wooden moulds. Once the moulds are removed, the walls are sealed with a thin sand and cement covering. Locally grown eucalyptus trees, which are strong but flexible, serve as pillars. These houses are not only stronger, they are also cheaper.

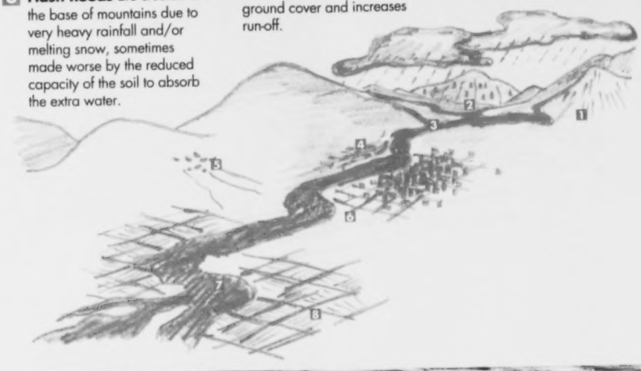
Entire villages have become involved in the rebuilding. Inspired by what they call the "minga" spirit, inherited from their Indian ancestors, villagers meet once a week for a day of collective work. Women bake bread using wheat flour donated by a United Nations agency, and they all eat together as they work.

The introduction of new technology, a little help from outside and the traditional minga spirit are combined to rebuild homes and prepare villagers in Ecuador against any future disaster.

what causes a flood?

Most disasters are not entirely natural. Human activity can increase their risks and insufficient attention makes their effects much more severe. Study the sketch below and find out what causes a flood and what can be done to lessen damage from it. Ask your teacher if you find anything difficult to understand.

1. **Poor farming techniques** increase soil erosion.
2. **Deforestation of slopes** increases run-off.
3. **Flash floods** are created at the base of mountains due to very heavy rainfall and/or melting snow, sometimes made worse by the reduced capacity of the soil to absorb the extra water.
4. **Sediment** from erosion settles to the river bottom and gradually raises flood levels in the river.
5. **Overgrazing** reduces ground cover and increases run-off.
6. **Flood plain**
7. **Delta**
8. **Flood plains in rural areas** often attract farmers because of fertile land.



how an earthquake damages a house

1

A vulnerable house consists of heavy materials stacked in place without a continuous frame for reinforcement.

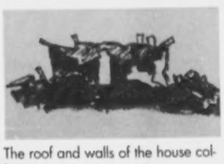
2

The house sways with the motion of the earth during an earthquake.

3

The house cannot bear the growing pressure created by the continuous motion.

4



The roof and walls of the house collapse.

GET READY BEFORE IT STRIKES

Disaster situations differ from country to country and from community to community, but this wallsheet, originally produced in New Zealand, will give you some ideas about what you can do if your area is hit by one of the natural disasters mentioned below. If you find something difficult to understand, ask your teacher to explain. Later, tell your parents and others what you have learned.

earthquake

IMMEDIATE ACTION

Indoors:

- **Do not rush outside.** Get your family into doorways, under tables, or, if they are bedridden, under their beds; keep away from windows and chimneys.

Outdoors:

- **Keep clear** of buildings, high walls or dangling electric wires. If you are in a city, seek shelter under archways or doorways but **do not** re-enter damaged buildings.

Driving:

- If you feel the earthquake when riding in a car or bus, ask the driver to pull over and stop. Stay inside the vehicle.

AS SOON AS YOU CAN

Remind your parents (or other adults) to:

- **Put out** all domestic fires and turn off heaters.
- **Turn off** electricity, gas, home heating oil and water if the house is damaged.
- **Leave the house** if a fire starts that cannot be put out at once.
- **Leave the house** if a gas leak is detected **after** the gas is turned off.
- **Save water**. Fill all emergency containers.
- **Free pets** and domestic animals (dogs, cats, cows, etc.)

flood

- **Listen to the radio** for advance information and advice.
- **Ask adults to disconnect all electrical appliances** and move all valuable personal and household goods and clothing out of reach of flood water, if you are warned or if you suspect that flood waters may reach the house.
- **Help move** vehicles, farm animals and movable goods to the highest ground nearby.
- **Prevent dangerous pollution** — move all insecticides out of reach of the water.
- Ask adults to **turn off** electricity, home heating oil and gas if you have to leave the house.
- **Lock** all outside doors and windows if you have to leave the house.
- **Do not enter** flood waters on foot or in a car if you can avoid it.
- **Never wander around** a flood area on your own.

tsunami

(Commonly called "tidal waves")

If you live in a low-lying area near the sea or an estuary:

- **Listen to the radio** for advance information and advice.
- **Do the same things** you would do for a flood.
- **Move** to high ground or as far inland as possible if a tsunami or tidal wave warning is given.
- **Keep away** from streams flowing into the sea.
- **Never** go down to the beach. If you see a tidal wave it will be too late to escape.

cyclone

(Hurricanes and typhoons are other names for tropical cyclones)

- **Listen to the radio** for advance information and advice. Allow considerable margin for safety. A storm may change direction, speed or intensity within a few hours, so stay tuned to the radio for updated information.

PREPARATION

If storm-force winds or severe gales are forecast for your area:

- **Store or secure** loose boards, corrugated iron, rubbish tins or anything else that could become dangerous.
- **Tape up** large windows to prevent them from shattering.
- **Move** to the nearest storm shelter (if your house is not storm-resistant) or assist your parents in evacuating the area if this is ordered by the appropriate government agency.

When the storm hits

- **Stay indoors** and take shelter in the strongest part of your house.
- **Listen to the radio** and follow instructions.
- **Open windows** on the sheltered side of the house if the roof begins to lift.
- **Find shelter** if you are caught out in the open.
- **Do not go outside** or onto a beach during a lull in the storm.

Cyclones are often accompanied by large storm surges from the ocean or lakes, and the precautions listed above for floods should be taken if you live near the coast.

volcanic activity

- **Listen to the radio** for information and advice.
- **Find shelter**, but NOT in a building with a low-pitched roof if heavy ash is falling.
- **Avoid** basements or confined spaces where dangerous gases may accumulate.
- **Move** to high ground, if you are in the open. Keep well above the shoreline of large lakes.
- **Wear** substantial covering over your head and body if you have to move in an ash shower. **Breathe through a handkerchief**; **carry** a flashlight even if it is daytime; and **move** as quickly as you can away from the eruption.

(Source: Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (Vol. II), United Nations, 1984)

suggestions for teachers

The 1992 Student Leaflet is devoted to an important concern of the United Nations: the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The following suggestions are intended to stimulate your own ideas for teaching about the United Nations and disaster reduction and for helping students from 8 to 14 years old to understand their role in today's world.

1 why? GOALS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Disaster prevention and relief is one aspect of United Nations work that even quite young students may find easy to understand and follow. Since they may be exposed to natural hazards of one kind or another, learning about natural disasters and the observance of the International Decade aimed at their reduction can fit into many curricula.

Learning about natural disasters and the International Decade will help students:

- appreciate the power of natural forces in the environment;
- learn about disaster preparedness and prevention;
- learn about the humanitarian and relief work of the United Nations;
- understand about community solidarity in times of distress;
- discover that everyone can make an active contribution to his or her own safety and that of the community.

2 what? FOCUS AND THEMES

Multidisciplinary content: Disaster-related topics can be included in many existing curriculum subjects. In *geography*, students may discover areas prone to floods, cyclones, earthquakes or volcanic activity. In *science*, they can study how and why different natural forces become violent and cause disasters. In *history* and *social studies*, they can study how community members cooperate to improve the well-being of all and help one another in times of distress.

Dealing with today's disasters: There will be natural disasters as long as natural hazards exist. On the average, 20 major disasters of various types occur in the world each year. The present surge in population is magnifying the extent of these disasters. Over the past two decades, they have claimed perhaps 3 million lives and caused upheaval and dislocation for at least 1 billion people. Almost 95 per cent of disaster-related deaths occur among the poor in developing countries, where two thirds of the world's people live. Annual damage is estimated at more than $50 billion worldwide, but much of this could be avoided by appropriate preparedness. Human activities, such as poor farming techniques and deforestation, often aggravate the risks. The poor are among those most affected.

Growing capabilities: Fortunately, expanding scientific knowledge and technologies allow us to forecast most natural hazards. Satellites can monitor seismic readings and other potential danger signs, databases can store disaster information, hazardous areas can be mapped. Thus, people can be warned in advance about an impending disaster and adequate planning can minimize risks.

Preparedness and prevention: Both short- and long-term preparedness and prevention measures can be adopted to reduce damage from natural disasters. Governments and communities can take temporary protective measures by mobilizing medical teams and fire-fighting services or, in extreme cases, by evacuating the population from danger areas. Long-term protective measures, such as earthquake-resistant design and construction of essential services, appropriate shelters, industrial plants, urban lifelines, etc., may also be planned and gradually implemented.

International cooperation: The United Nations, through the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, is leading international cooperation in disaster relief and related matters (see box).

3 how? APPROACHES AND METHODS

Learning from reality: The most effective teaching about disasters uses examples of actual situations related to the students' own experience. A local disaster can be studied through newspaper stories, personal accounts or talks with survivors.

If you cannot use a local example, your students can gather detailed information on a disaster in some other place and then use their imagination to dramatize it. They can study the disaster from early signs, preparations made (what and by whom), warnings and actions taken, the nature of the disaster and damage it caused, and finally what was done to recover from it and what may be done to reduce damage from similar disasters in future and in other places.

The class can be asked to take part in the dramatization of a radio programme. Episodes could include: an observer's description of the disaster while it is occurring, "situation reports" by the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, an interview with a family in a refugee shelter, and the type of assistance requested (e.g. cash, medical supplies, emergency services for relief and rehabilitation).

Positive approaches: A human-centred and positive approach will be useful in teaching about disasters. The emphasis should not be placed on visuals of destruction and suffering, however realistic they may be. Rather, the students should learn about the way a community prepares and responds to the sufferings of its own members through cooperation. By highlighting the role of the United Nations, the common links among all nations of the world can also be stressed.

Active methods: From the wallsheet included in this leaflet, students can learn what each of them should do before, during and after a disaster. They should also have the opportunity to take *practical actions*. They can help their families, schools and local communities prepare for potential disasters. Students may also be encouraged to take part in such actions as collecting funds or clothes for victims of a recent natural disaster. This can give them the sense that their local efforts are part of a world-wide undertaking.

4 where? SUGGESTED RESOURCES

IDNDR secretariat, the Department of Humanitarian Assistance/UNDRO and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations have produced a large number of information materials on IDNDR and its related themes. Various United Nations specialized agencies, like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), have also produced IDNDR-related publications.

To obtain these and other materials contact your nearest United Nations Information Centre or Service. You can also write to the *Public Inquiries Unit, Department of Public Information, Room GA-057, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, USA.*

International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

Since it was founded in 1945, the United Nations on many occasions has provided assistance to countries hit by disasters caused by nature and by human activities. To coordinate its growing involvement in the area, the United Nations General Assembly in 1971 established the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) as the focal point of the United Nations system's disaster relief activities. At times of disaster, UNDRO helps assess the damage and evaluate emegency needs, mobilizes aid from the international community and coordinates relief activities. In 1992, UNDRO was expanded into the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, which now assumes responsibility for all emergency relief activities.

To encourage concerted global efforts to reduce the impact of natural disasters, the General Assembly in December 1989 proclaimed the 1990s the *International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR)*. The Decade mainly addresses the natural hazards that create sudden disasters, including the impact of disasters caused by drought and locust infestation. IDNDR aims to share among all countries the technology to monitor natural hazards and quickly distribute information, as well as initiate programmes and guidelines for reducing the impact of natural disasters. To further draw attention to the efforts being made, the United Nations designated the second Wednesday of October each year as the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction.

In close collaboration with UNDRO, a secretariat for IDNDR has been set up in Geneva which is now part of the Office of the Disaster Relief Coordinator. A scientific and technical committee, composed of up to 25 high-level specialists, provides guidance on substantive issues, and a special high-level council, composed of well-known personalities, assists in creating global awareness about natural disaster reduction.

For more information, write to: *DHA/UNDRO, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland*

Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
DPI/1225—92520—August 1992—50M